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ABSTRACT

This set of 24 bulletins provides parents with information on various topics related to child development, behavior and education. Topics discussed include: parents as role models; parental needs; parental expectations; talking with one's child; avoiding childhood labels; helping children learn to cope; setting limits; listening to children; helping children develop interests; taking stands on important issues; understanding behavior; gaining cooperation; spanking and discipline; coping with parental stress; consistency in discipline; children's feelings; the father's role in parenting; children's fears; vital signs of preschool development; communicating honestly with children; sibling rivalry; children and television; attention and rewards; and the importance of peers. Background readings, including ERIC documents, are listed for each topic. A brief guide to using the ERIC information retrieval system is provided. (Author/RH)

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FAMILY LIVING

Suggestions for Effective Parenting

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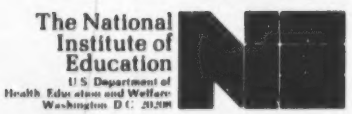

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Family Living: Suggestions for Effective Parenting

The "Family Living" series, a set of 24 bulletins dealing with a variety of topics related to child development and parenting, was prepared by the staffs of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE) and the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service with financial support from the Illinois Homemakers Extension Federation via the Homemakers Support Fund.

Background: A Pilot Parent Education Project

The series was designed for use in a pilot project to provide parents with information related to child development, behavior and education. The project was coordinated by Extension Assistant Nancy Weller under the supervision of Dr. Karen Craig, Assistant Director, Cooperative Extension, University of Illinois.

As part of the project, the 24 bulletins were mailed at regular intervals to county extension advisers throughout Illinois; advisers in turn distributed copies to interested parents in their county. In addition, news releases and tape recorded radio spots were prepared to present highlights from the bulletins via the local media. The radio spots featured interviews with Dr. Lilian G. Katz, Director of ERIC/EECE, and Lynda Harriman of the Cooperative Extension Service.

The bulletins were also distributed by ERIC/EECE to teacher educators, child care directors, and others interested in parent education. When the project was completed in spring, 1980, the bulletins were collected into this packet for convenient use in parent education programs.

Availability of Project Materials

This packet of bulletins is available from ERIC/EECE, College of Education, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL 61801, as catalog #188. The cost is $3.50 per packet, including postage and handling. (Orders under $5.00 must be prepaid.)

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FAMILY LIVING

PARENTS AS ROLE MODELS

Are you familiar with the old saying, "Monkey see, monkey do?" We certainly don't think of our children as monkeys but this same principle does apply in most parent-child relationships.

Parental Influences

The influence of a living example on children's behaviors is greater than many have believed. It is clear that children pattern much of their behavior after models encountered during their early years. In most cases the model that children strongly imitate and identify with is that of their parents. Our attitudes, ideas, opinions, and prejudices are quickly picked up by our children. Likes and dislikes, interests, manners and morals are learned mainly through imitation. How we cope with frustration affects how our children learn to handle problems. As parents we may safely act on the long-held assumption that our children will be affected more by what we do than what we say. Often our unintentional influences are as important as our carefully thought out techniques of child rearing.

Family Atmosphere

The child not only unconsciously imitates the behavior of a parent, but will also absorb the general atmosphere of the home; friendly and cooperative, hostile and antagonistic, or concerned with social status. A child's personality is influenced by these emotional undertones, making it important to look at the general atmosphere we're creating as well as the specific model we're furnishing, if we want our children to grow up in a desirable way. In most cases if we show good table manners, our children will imitate us as they grow. If we are persistent in what we attempt to do and don't give up at the first signs of difficulty, our children will imitate our persistence. If we want children to respect the rights and feelings of others, we can begin by respecting the rights and feelings of our children. A good example is a powerful way we can teach them.

Adult Roles

As children grow older, this need for role models does not decrease. Finding an adequate role model during the pre-teen and teen years is just as important as during the early years of childhood.

During the pre - teens children usually benefit from a role model of the same sex. They are moving from the awareness of childhood to the issues of adults. It is as if a youngster thinks, "I'm moving from childhood; soon I'll be an adult, what are the ways of a grown man (or woman) ?" The child needs close sustained adult contact, making the parent of the same sex the obvious choice in filling this modeling role.

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Not only are pre-teens focusing on the roles of men and women, but they are developing attitudes toward these roles. Relying on the powerful force of unconscious imitation as a great builder of attitudes, we can furnish living positive models of what it means to be a man or woman. What are your children learning from you with regard to what men or women are like? Your adult roles and attitudes toward these roles as well as your attitudes toward the opposite sex are conveyed to your children.

Parental Values

Parents must identify and resolve conflicting values in order to establish a set of clear-cut values they can transmit to their children. One difficulty in transmitting a clear-cut set of values is our tendency not to practice what we preach. Sometimes we communicate double messages to children. For example, take the parent who spanks his child as punishment for hitting his brother. The parent actually imitates the behavior for which he is punishing the child. Here the parent is unconsciously being drawn to the same level as the child. The child may be confused by the double message received: "I'm not supposed to hit my brother, but it is o. k. for my parent to hit me."

If what a parent does and says is consistent during the child's formative years, such conflicts are not as likely to occur. Children are more likely to learn what we want them to learn from examples we set.

Remember children pattern much of their behavior as well as their attitudes and values from you. What you do often speaks much louder than what you say.

Background Readings

Being a Parent -- Unchanging Values in a Changing World, by Karl S. Bernhardt, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Canada (1973).

How to Parent, by Dr. Fitzhugh Dodson, Nash Publishing, 9255 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90069 (1970).

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Your Child's Self Esteem by Dorothy Corkille Briggs, Dolphin Books, Garden City, New York (1975).

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*These documents and others are available through the ERIC System. For more information contact ERIC/EECE.

Prepared by Lynda Harriman, Extension Child & Family Development Specialist and Nancy Weller, Extension Assistant - Communications.

FAMILY LIVING

PARENTAL NEEDS

There is no more important job in our society than being the unique combination of child psychologist/ teacher called parent, responsible for rearing the next generation.

As a parent you are largely responsible for the formation and development of your child's self-concept. Self-concept is a basic mental picture one has of one's self. Ironically your feelings about yourself and your own self-concept influence your child's developing self-concept. Children are quick to pick up parents' feelings from non-verbal signals. They sense when you are confident, unsure, pleased or displeased. They know when you are experiencing emotional tension and unrest. Relaxed mothers and fathers help in the development of relaxed secure children.

Parents Have Needs, Too

Being a parent, responsible for meeting the needs of children does not mean our own needs can or should be ignored. We all need to feel good about ourselves. In fact, if we don't like and accept ourselves, it will likely be difficult for us to feel good about our children.

Sometimes parents look to their children to provide them with a sense of self-worth and adequacy. Children cannot and should not be expected to meet parents' needs for adequacy and self-esteem. When we look to our children as the sole source of self worth we are apt to put unrealistic expectations and pressures on them as well as ourselves, because we view their limitations as a reflection on our ability to parent. Recognizing and accepting that we are each responsible for our own emotional well-being and feelings of adequacy is important for self-growth and effective parenting.

Set Realistic Expectations of Self

When we expect too much of ourselves as parents, we try to do more for our children than is humanly possible. Consequently, we may leave ourselves feeling emotionally exhausted and inadequate, because we can't conform to some idealized notion of what we should be doing for our children.

We all have limits. Honestly assessing our talents and capabilities, can help us develop more realistic expectations of ourselves as parents. Accepting our limitations can save needless feelings of guilt and anxiety.

Define what you can and cannot do in terms of time, effort and money to further your children's growth to maturity. Let promises to them come from realistic guidelines rather than the wish to be and do everything for them.

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Like Yourself

Seek out people who treat you with respect, whom you enjoy and who enjoy being with you. Get involved in activities that give you a feeling of competence and achievement. Having personal goals and achievements can help guard against expecting children to be one's only source of recognition and success.

Continue to Grow

As a person, parenthood is just one phase in your total development. Some of your resources must remain available for your own continuing personal development. Personal growth and effort provide a sense of self-worth. As we feel more adequate as individuals, we are apt to feel more adequate and confident in our role as parents.

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The Joys and Sorrows of Parenthood formulated by the Committee on Public Education, Volume VIII, Report No. 84, May 1973 Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 419 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016

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FAMILY LIVING

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEERS

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star, what you say is what you are." "I'm rubber, you're glue; whatever you say sticks on you!"

These tongue twisters may seem silly, but for your child, knowing them is a part of belonging to the group. The feeling of belonging and the group contacts that result play an important role in the emotional and social development of your child.

Being able to relate to others is a basic human need. Your child's first attachment is to you, the one who most closely fills needs and nurtures. Usually between the age of three and four, children are likely to find a pal, a peer who has come into their lives in the yard, in nursery school, or in the park. From this point on, a child's destiny is determined in part by the power of peers. Through interaction with peers, important attitudes and behaviors are shaped.

Peer Influences

Relationship Skills. In the world of peers, children learn socializing skills, such as how to share, to wait one's turn, to ask for something from another child, to put feelings into words. Learning to stand up for one's rights, to express feelings without fists, to participate as well as to observe, to develop self-confidence in relation to other children are important skills learned in relations with peers. Children are not born with these basic social and emotional skills. These skills are learned.

Self Image. Earning a place in the group has a real bearing on your child's self image. The child who is an outsider begins to feel inadequate. The longer negative feelings persist the less adequate a child feels and behaves.

Have you ever observed youngsters who seem to enjoy spending most of their time with adults, rather than their agemates? It may be a clue that these children are not making it in the world of peers. Not relating to the group is a misfortune in development. Children's peers are their generation. The child who succeeds in the world of peers during early childhood will enter the middle-childhood years with a solid sense of self-respect and self-confidence, enabling the child to better handle relationship problems.

Sharing. Peer groups help children learn to handle give and take relationships with other children. At nursery school a little boy wanted to play with the truck another boy was using.

> "Gimme that truck!" he demanded.
> "I'm playing with it," retorted the other boy.
> "Gimme that truck!" he repeated.
> "I will not," said the other.
> "I'm sick--now gimme that truck."

The other boy made no response. As you watched, you could feel the wheel of interaction going around in the

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boy's head. "This works fine on Mother and she gives in to me--why doesn't it work with this boy."

Reality Testing. Group play provides important benefits. Playmates force children to face realities of their world. They teach what is acceptable and what is not. Many times you'll hear comments such as "you brag too much." "Drop dead," "Why don't you wash your hair once in a while? It stinks!" "You're a poor sport." Children are blatantly honest with one another, socializing with blunt sledge hammer comments.

Learning how to live and abide by rules which are a fact of life, if the child hopes to abide peacefully in this world, is partially learned through peer interaction. If you observe a group of children, you'll find they usually have a set of strict rules that are rigidly followed by group members. It may be only a game of hide and seek, but if Paul is "it" and doesn't say "Here I come ready or not" after he has counted to ten, his playmates will likely label him unfair. This situation illustrates the need for solid structure outside as the youngster edges away from the family unit.

Functions of Peers

Family Replacement. Peer groups provide a certain status, quite independent of one's family. They may also be a stabilizing influence during a time when adolescents are going through developmental changes. As one sixteen year old boy put it, "I hate these dumb pimples, but I'd hate them more if I was the only one who had them."

Belonging. Peers often provide a positive influence on one's self-esteem. It's a good feeling to be important to someone outside the family unit. In our culture, growing children need group support to gather necessary strength to eventually stand on their own. Acceptance from age mates and the mastery of physical and social skills, nurtures this sense of competence. Belonging and believing one has something to offer is vital to one's sense of well-being.

Transmit Values. Contact with peers exposes children and youth to the standards of others besides those of their parents. It is important for them to realize that these different standards do exist. This prepares them to interact and cope in a society which may not always agree with their views and ideas. Children who have a strong sense of self-esteem and who have learned to evaluate ideas and solve problems rationally, have skills which will serve as guides when they are exposed to their peers' ideas and values. Strong family values give a child a good basis for deciding whether to incorporate new and different values into their lives.

Parents remain primary figures as models and transmitters of values and attitudes. This is true even

during the adolescent years. In most cases adolescents still turn to parents for help in decision-making choices considered difficult and having life-affecting impact. Parental influence generally outweighs that of peers in areas of moral values, deciding which college to attend and making career choices. Peer direction is sought more for "here and now" behavior, such as which record to buy, or with whom to associate. These are all situations where peer conformity is important in order to be considered part of the group.

Protection. The peer group offers protection to some extent from the world of adults. Being able to say "everyone" is doing it is more persuasive than "he" or "she" is doing it.

Experience. Peer groups provide an opportunity to practice by doing, to try out different roles. Dating, participation in extracurricular activities, bull sessions about life are all important rehearsal experiences for eventual adulthood. Feedback from peers is immediate. It provides cues and information which can be used to modify and refine one's emerging concept of who I am, and what roles can I play.

Background Readings

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*These documents and others are available through the ERIC system. For more information contact ERIC/EECE.

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FAMILY LIVING

FL-4

PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

"What a big girl you are!" "You've got your mom's red hair." Phrases like these give children a clue to the way people feel about them as individuals. They begin to develop an idea of what they can and cannot do. These ideas build into an image of being either lovable or not so lovable, capable or not so capable individuals. Parents play a special role in this development. Parents' feelings about and reactions to their children have a strong influence on children's feelings about "who they are."

Family Life Ought To Be Peaceful

Some people expect family life to be peaceful without friction or stress between parents and children. This idea is unfortunate since family peace is not always possible. It also promotes the notion that when there is friction, someone or something has gone wrong. The very nature of child growth and change often produces stress. Periods of relative calm are attainable but are by nc means permanent. As children grow and change, parents must also change, or at least adjust their expectations, if stress and friction are to be minimized.

Children as Second Chance

Parents sometimes expect their children to follow in their footsteps or reach goals they didn't have the opportunity to reach. A father who feels he was penalized because he lacked education might do anything to see that his son gets a college diploma, whether the son wants one or not. A mother who always had financial worries may want her daughter to be financially successful. These expectations may cause parents to push their children to achieve. Some push scholarships, others, athletic skill or music. Learning and sports become such serious business that little thought is given to enjoyment. If the pressure becomes too great, children may drop out entirely in reaction to expectations they can't possibly meet. It is better not to try, than to risk failure and not be able to live up to parental expectations.

Children as Extensions

Children are often viewed as extensions of their parents' lives, especially the highly valued aspects. Parents naturally take pride in their children's positive actions. Through their children, parents may see themselves extended into future generations. When parents expect children to be carbon copies of themselves, differences are not tolerated well.

Viewing children as extensions of ourselves is an injustice to the individual child. Every person is unique in some way. Parents should expect differences in their children and accept differences as natural. Children of baseball fans are not all natural athletes and beautiful mothers do have awkward children.

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Expectations -- High or Low?

When expectations are too high or too rigid, parents set themselves up for disappointment, because their children may be unable to fulfill them. Disappointments can accumulate and may cause parents to react in negative, non-accepting ways toward children.

But parents must not throw out expectations lock, stock, and barrel. Just as expectations which are too high make children feel they are constant failures, low expectations may come through as lack of faith. Lack of faith wipes out the child's feeling of value.

Realistic Expectations

A parent's real challenge is trying to set realistic expectations for children. Realistic expectations are based on knowledge of children's developing abilities and interests.

Age is a helpful guideline, but should not serve as a hard and fast rule in setting expectations. Give the child opportunities to try different activities and tasks. Then observe carefully. Can the child succeed? Does the child need instruction and assistance? Is the activity extremely frustrating and upsetting to the child? Can the child succeed with encouragement and a little help? Treating children assembly line fashion is not respecting individuality. Each child is different and will react differently to expectations. Becoming a keen observer of your child's ability to meet expectations is a useful guide in judging how realistic your expectations are.

Parents need to consider past and present pressures affecting their children. Look at the world from your child's point of view. This can help you make allowances in what to expect.

Examine Expectations

Why do we have certain expectations for our children? Finding the answer might be done by observing our behavior toward each child, identifying our expectations and writing them down. Each expectation should be checked for fairness. Do the expectations meet parental needs alone? Images that do not fit the uniqueness of the child should be discarded.

Unfulfilled personal and parental needs may cause one to put undue pressure on a child. Ask yourself "Do I feel loved?" "Do I have a sense of personal worth and achievement, recognition and belonging in my relationship with adults?" Children must not be saddled with the burden of being the sole providers of these needs.

Analyzing what we expect and why we have certain expectations is an important step in becoming more realistic in our own parental behavior. How parents feel about their children influences how children feel about themselves. Realistic expectations offer parents an opportunity for gratification rather than disappointment, and allow children to be only themselves with their own set of unique qualities.

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*These documents and others are available through the ERIC system. For more information contact ERIC/EECE.

Prepared by Lynda Harriman, Extension Child and Family Development Specialist and Nancy Weller, Extension Assistant-Communications.

FAMILY LIVING

FL-5

HINTS FOR HANDLING SIBLING RIVALRY

Most parents are uncomfortable and troubled when their children fight and tease each other. The popular view seems to be that this kind of behavior (generally called sibling rivalry) is both natural and inevitable.

However, while some rivalry among siblings may be inevitable, it is not apparent in all families in all cultures. The point here is that parents do not have to stand by and let their children go at it. They don't have to put up with it.

Squabbling and teasing can have causes other than sibling rivalry. But if you are reasonably sure that the scrapping is due to sibling competition, some of these approaches might suggest ways to help you deal with it in your family.

Dealing with Sibling Rivalry

Stop the Fighting. If fighting between your children bothers you, stop it. Resist the temptation to lecture, moralize or nag about it. Whatever technique you use (telling or commanding the children to stop, separating the children, etc.) stay with your resolve to stop the fighting until the episode is really over, since your persistence increases the credibility of your commands and strengthens your authority.

Keep in mind that often children are waiting for you to exert your authority, and by their behavior are saying, "Help me to be the kind of person you want me be be because that is the kind of person I want to be."

Pinpoint the Cause. Once the unpleasant behavior is stopped, think over the possible causes and ways of dealing with it. Since rivalry seems to be a function of scarcity, when teasing and squabbling occurs with troubling frequency and intensity, ask yourself what it is that one or all the children perceive to be in short supply. It could be affection, praise, recognition or some other forms of attention. It is helpful to acknowledge your child's perceptions, even though you do not agree with them. For instance, if your child perceives herself to be less loved by you or less important to you than another child is, acknowledge her right to see things that way.

Give Undivided Attention. Try to spend time alone with the child doing what she or he really enjoys. A walk around the block. Reading stories, cooking or swimming. Make sure it is something the child enjoys. Ten minutes a day for a week can turn around the child's feelings of being left out or unimportant.

Respect Individuality. Remember that treating children alike is sure to be unfair. When you treat children alike you teach them to expect to be treated alike, and then they push you into giving them equal amounts of various things--although it's very unlikely that children within a family will ever all need the same things in the same amounts at the same time. If one child seeks comfort and another demands "equal time," reassure the second one that when he or she needs comfort, you will be right there ready

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to provide it--as you have done before many times. It is important to reassure a child that each individual person's unique needs are responded to -- not that all get the same response.

No Comparisons. Resist the temptation to motivate your children by comparing them to each other or to other people's children. Avoid saying to children something such as "The Parker kids always help with the dishes," or "You could get grades like your brother does if you work a little harder." Comparisons of this kind teach children that they are in constant danger of coming out poorly in a contest, and a habit of competitiveness may develop.

Let Children Help. Take advantage of opportunities to let one of your children help you understand another. Children can often contribute valuable insight to parents on what a sibling is struggling with, thinking about or trying to express. If you ask a child to help you in this way, take any contributions seriously, and let the child know that you will reflect on the insights shared.

Counter Nasty Comments. If your children say genuinely nasty things about one another to you, use those occasions to indicate that you do not agree and to point out that "although we get angry with each other, we still belong to each other." For example, if a boy describes his sister to you in unflattering terms, it seems to help to let him know that no matter how unpleasant the sister's behavior may seem at the moment, she still is and always will be "one of us." This kind of response reassures him that if a sibling had ill feelings toward him you would respond in the same way. When we consistently remind children of their unalterable belonging to us and to each other, we strengthen their inner sense of safety, which is perhaps a prerequisite for the development of the capacity for brotherly and sisterly love.

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Prepared by Lilian G. Katz, director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, with Mary Glockner, ERIC / EECE editor.

FAMILY LIVING

FL-6

TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD

One of the best ways to foster children's language development is to have conversations with them. (By "conversation" we mean a real verbal exchange between adult and child, not just an adult talking to a child.) But many adults find it difficult to talk easily with young children. Often they can't think of what to say, and the conversation "just doesn't seem to go anywhere."

Ideas That May Help

Be Interested. Solicit children's ideas and opinions regularly. If you show children that you are really interested in what they think, what they feel, and in their opinions, they will become comfortable about expressing their thoughts to you.

Avoid Deadend Questions. Ask children the kinds of questions that will be likely to extend interaction rather that to cut it off. Questions which require a yes or no or right answer ("What color is your sweater?") often lead a conversation to a dead end. But questions such as "What are some of the colors you like?" or "What are some other clothes you have of this color?" may extend the conversation.

Extend Conversation. Try to pick up a piece of a child's conversation and extend it. For instance, if a child says "I like to watch TV", then, in your response, use some of the same wording the child has used ("what are some of the TV shows you like best?"). If the child says: "Wonder Woman", then your next response could be "What does Wonder Woman do that you like seeing?" When you use the child's own phrasing or her own terms, you strengthen her confidence in her own conversational and verbal skills, and reassure her that her ideas are being listened to and valued.

Share Your Thoughts. Share with your child what you are thinking about. For instance, if you are puzzling over how to rearrange your furniture, or what to prepare for dinner, get your child involved with questions such as "I'm not sure where to put this shelf - where do you think would be a good place?" Or "What do you think Uncle John might like for dessert?" Be sure to take the child's comments seriously, thinking through with the practical implications of the ideas and suggestions offered.

Define and Reflect Feelings. When you suspect that something is bothering your child, make the best guess you can about what the problem is. Then phrase your questions indirectly: "It's the noise of the vacuum cleaner that bothers you isn't it?" If you guessed right, you could talk about what to do, or how to cope with the problem. If you guessed wrong, you would be giving your child a chance to correct you and tell you what really is bothering him. Sometimes, just reflecting a child's feelings back to him encourages him to tell you what's on his mind. Saying: "You're really feeling sad today, aren't

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you?" is more likely to invite a child to share and confide his feelings in you than asking: "What's wrong?"

Observe Cue. Watch the child for cues that it is time to end a conversation. When a child begins to stare into space, give really silly or way-out responses, it's probably time to stop the exchange.

Increases Understanding

One of the special values of adult-child conversation is that it gives children an opportunity to sort out and retrieve information they have already stored in their minds. In other words, they get opportunities to practice talking about thoughts, feelings, and impressions from experiences they have already had. At the same time, adults have a chance to find out about the children and how they understand those experiences. The more informed we are about how children understand their experiences, the more likely we are to help them to make the best sense of these experiences.

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FAMILY LIVING

FL-7

AVOIDING CHILDHOOD LABELS

The tendency in families to define a child's character fairly early in life can be a hazard for some children. Not only parents, but often grandparents, siblings, relatives and teachers get into the act, too. In this way a child may get defined as the "clumsy" one, the "shy" one, the "cry baby" or the "class clown."

Labels Stick

These definitions of character are often very powerful and enduring. Indeed, many adults report that when they go home on special occasions they almost magically find themselves behaving in exactly the way they were defined as children. As one woman put it: "When I'm with my own friends and colleagues I feel perfectly competent and intelligent--but among my family, every time I open my mouth I say something stupid, and feel stupid--just the way they expect me to!"

If you find yourself defining a child's character, you too may be locking that child into a set of behaviors and attitudes and a self-image he or she cannot escape.

How to Avoid Labels

One alternative strategy is to try to imagine what the child might be like with a different character. Try to picture in your mind how this child would behave, how he or she would interact with you, with others, how he or she would respond to various situations. For example, if a child has been defined as the "cry-baby" or as a "whiner" or as excessively dependent, try to imagine the child as a responsible, competent or cooperative member of the family. Then treat the child as though he or she were, in fact, like that picture.

Several interesting things begin to happen when you try this approach. You gradually become aware of the fact that, at least some of the time, the child does have those behaviors--you just hadn't noticed them very often.

You then begin to respond to this child's attempts at self-assertion (talking back to his brother, for instance) more positively than you had before. Once you see these competencies, you can more easily make room for the child to express his or her potential for another character. Your own new confidence in the child's alternative capacities has a way of strengthening his or her own confidence as well.

Remind Others

In the same way, it helps to remind other members of the family to acknowledge and respect this child's attempt to express his or her competencies, and to resist defining him or her into a "character corner."

Making opportunities for all members of the family to try out a variety of roles and characters is one way to enhance the future adaptability of each of them.

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FAMILY LIVING

FL-8

HELPING CHILDREN LEARN TO COPE

Even three- and four-year-olds can have their share of problems: getting used to going to nursery school, losing a treasured pet, adjusting to a new babysitter, being called bad names by another child, and so forth. Adults know that these crises will pass and soon will be forgotten, and at such moments we try to offer comfort and reassurance that things will get better soon.

Offer Suggestions

However, in many of these situations we adults can and should do more than just offer appropriate sympathy. We can often suggest tactics and strategies to help the child cope with the immediate problem as well as with similar situations which might occur in the future. When we cannot change the situation or the people who are causing the distress the young child is struggling with, we should think through some ways in which the child might be able to endure them less traumatically.

For example, suppose a young child is really afraid of a neighbor's dog. It's not always possible to persuade the neighbor to move, or to tether his dog at all times! What is appropriate here is to think of tactics that even a young child can carry with him to use in that particular (or similar) situations. You can explain to the child that whenever he sees a dog approaching he should stand absolutely still and be quiet and calm until the dog has finished sniffing and acquainting itself with him. Unless the dog is really and truly a vicious one, this tactic will usually be effective. (If it's a vicious dog,other drastic action must be taken, of course.)

Be Understanding

If is also important as you prepare the child to cope with this problem that you let him know that you understand his apprehension and that you are confident that it will pass; you are offering the child a strategy to use while he needs it, but he surely will not need it forever.

Similarly, if a neighborhood child persists in calling your child upsetting names or teases your child cruelly, the best move you can make is to provide the child with a strategy for dealing firmly with the offender.

I know of a 5-year-old who was taunted by older neighborhood children who persisted in calling him "a stupid cry baby!" In helping the victim to cope with the problem his mother asked him gently and seriously "Are you a stupid cry baby?!" The child of course replied "No!" The mother then suggested quite seriously that he say to the offenders something like "I don't like to be talked to that way." His own first hand knowledge that he did not have the qualities attributed to him allowed him to address his adversaries with confidence. Even agressive name-callers find a confident 5-year-old intimidating enough to make them stop the behavior!

Experience is the Best Teacher

This example also illustrates

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another useful principle in helping children cope with the ordinary stresses of their daily lives, namely, to teach them to use the raw data of their own previous experiences as a source of reassurance. For instance, if your child is highly anxious about another visit to the dentist, don't promise him that it won't hurt or that it will be fun. You can say something like "Do you remember the last time you went? You were uncomfortable for a few minutes, but it wasn't really so bad, was it?" The child's own memory of having survived the experience can become a source of courage to cope with the situation once more. If, on the other hand, you falsify the nature of what's ahead, you may unwittingly increase the intensity of his discomfort.

Help for the Future

Giving the child some practical suggestions on what to do, or how to approach a situation, what kinds of things to say, etc. helps that child get along when parents or other protectors are not there. This keeps the focus on helping children to cope with the world as they are likely to find it, rather than on trying to change the world to suit them.

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FAMILY LIVING

COPING WITH PARENTAL STRESS

Rearing happy well-adjusted children is quite an accomplishment for any parent. Knowing that you are effective with your children and can meet their needs contributes to parents' feelings of satisfaction.

Hard work, responsibility, demands for time and attention are also part of parenting. This is the part of parenting that causes stress to mount and makes us feel caught and sometimes overwhelmed by demands constantly made upon us.

Feelings of Anxiety

The demands of a child are especially strenuous on new parents. It's a terrific adjustment to bring a baby home from the hospital and begin to take care of it.

A new parent may feel particularly worried and unsure. It's as if society suddenly says "You're a parent now, we haven't told you much about how to parent but go to it and do the best you can." Most jobs require a training period to acquaint you with new job responsibilities. But for the job of parenting, practically no education is available.

Parental uncertainty doesn't necessarily disappear as children grow. Just as we learn what to expect of an infant the child becomes a toddler. Parental stress may increase, if parents are unable to change their expectations and demands as children grow. Children change the most rapidly during the first two years of life and as they reach adolescence. Therefore parents may experience high levels of stress during these time periods, unless they learn to adjust to a changing child.

Parents need to realize that they are not magically equipped with "parental love" or a "mothering instinct" which enables them to automatically love and care for babies and children. It takes time, patience, experience and effort to build a positive parent-child relationship, and become an effective parent.

Feeling of Resentment

In addition to feeling inadequate about how to parent, mothers and fathers may sometimes be bothered by feelings of resentment. No one ever told you it would be like this. Taking care of children demands so much time and energy that it's not always possible to do some of the other things that are important to you. Interruptions come at the most inconvenient times. No matter how tired or ill you feel, children's needs must be met.

These feelings of resentment and anxiety are entirely normal. However, we must take care not to take them out on our children. When we begin to blame our children for our problems, it is time to seek help and make some changes in our lives.

Examine Your Feelings

When the pressures of parenting become great, they can cause us to overreact. Sometimes pressures are self-imposed because we try to run such a tight ship that neither we nor our children can relax. When you

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feel uptight with your children, ask yourself:

- Do I expect too much - must they always stay clean, keep their room spic and span, stay quiet, or meet my demands immediately?
- Can they do it their way sometimes? Does it really matter or must it always be my way?
- Do they always have to act like adults? Why can't I let them be children?
- Have I talked to anyone about my feelings? Have I talked to the children about theirs?

Relieve Stress

It is important for parents to sometimes make changes in order to cope with the daily demands of being a parent. Sometimes it helps to relieve tension when you:

- Talk to friends or spouse about your frustrations.
- Tell your children what makes you angry and what behavior the child needs to change to reduce your anger.
- Leave the room for a short time when you are losing control. You can deal more effectively with children and situations when you have time to collect your thoughts and calm down.
- If you are a new parent, have a relative, friend or paid help come in for the first few weeks.
- Take some time for yourself when children are sleeping. Relax and forget what you should be doing.

Stress and strain are not conducive to good parenting. All of us need to find a way to relieve pressure, so it is not taken out on our children.

Enjoy Being a Parent

When things are going well, parenting can be a satisfactory experience. It's important that you share your positive feelings with your children, too. Let them know that you feel good about the way the day is going. Tell them when their behavior is making you happy. Make sure they know you appreciate the good things they do. Say thank you and remember to treat yourself and your children to something special when they are doing well.

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Prepared by Lynda Harriman, Extension Child and Family Development Specialist and Nancy Weller, Extension Assistant-Communications.

FAMILY LIVING

FL-10

SETTING LIMITS

One of the most important functions of parenting is to help children learn to control their behavior by establishing clear guidelines regarding what is acceptable. Setting guidelines is not too difficult. Consistently enforcing them may be, because of the potential of creating a conflict between parent and child.

Why Set Limits?

Children feel secure. Children need a clear definition of acceptable conduct. They feel more secure when they know the borders of permissible action. Limits tell the child what behavior standards are acceptable. They provide a framework in which the child can function comfortably. When rules are clear, the child has the opportunity to make responsible decisions. The consequences of both positive and negative actions are known. Choices can be made between alternative ways of behaving with a clear, predictable picture of what parents' reactions will be.

Transmit values. Limits communicate to the child values considered important by family as well as culture. Parents set some rules, not because they personally disapprove of a particular behavior, but because they know friends, grandparents, neighbors and/or community in general would disapprove. Limits introduce children to a society that does have enforced regulations.

Guide against inappropriate behavior. Limits serve as a guide to prevent inappropriate behavior. Since children lack experience in judging the consequences of their behavior, they sometimes need to be protected from their inexperience and inability to judge situations and their consequences. Limits protect them from their own violent feelings and from expressing them in a destructive way. A general guideline is the younger the child the more rules parents will need.

Limits and Stages of Development

Limits established should take into consideration a child's individual needs and stage of growth. Sometimes a five year old can be trusted to cross a street alone. This would not be true of a two-year old.

Special stress situations -accidents, illness, moving, separation from friends, death or divorce require additional leeway in setting limits. Children should be aware that their behavior is not accepted, but tolerated only because of exceptional circumstances.

Number of Limits

The number of limits you set will depend upon personal values and standards. A good rule to keep in mind is to set only necessary limits. These would include limits to: protect the health and safety of a child; protect the property and rights of others; and protect and support the child against his/her own strong feelings. Too many rules may interfere with the child's need for activity and learning, making the child less spontaneous and creative. Imposing too many restrictions may result in resent-

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ment, causing the child to resist and anxiously await the day to be out from under rules rather than accepting them as a part of self discipline.

How to Set Limits

Be clear and specific. A limit should be stated telling the child clearly what constitutes acceptable behavior and what substitutes, if any, will be accepted. For example, "You may not throw dishes. You may throw the ball."

It is preferable that a limit be total rather than partial. A limit that states "You may splash her a little, as long as you don't get her too wet," is inviting trouble. Vague statements leave the child without clear criteria for making decisions.

When setting limits point out the function of an object. "The chair is for sitting, not for standing" is better than "Don't stand on the chair." "The blocks are for building" is more positive than "Don't throw the blocks."

Respect feelings. When children request something we must deny, we can at least grant them the satisfaction of having a wish for it. Their feelings are important too. Just because we feel a rule is necessary, doesn't mean they feel the same way. Limits should be phrased in a language that does not challenge the child's self-respect. "It's bedtime" is more readily accepted than "you are too young to stay up that late. Go to bed."

Expect compliance. There is a tendency for adults to get what they expect from children. If they expect children to be good and obey reasonable rules, they generally get compliance. Most of the time children are aware of serious expectations and obey adult directives - especially from parents.

Limits As A Guide

Children need limits. They provide a guide toward acceptable behavior and cultural values. How parents enforce these limits affects the child's acceptance and positive response.

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FAMILY LIVING

FL-11

CONSISTENCY IN DISCIPLINE

Every parent has learned how important it is to be consistent in child discipline. Children find learning much easier when learning conditions remain constant. As a parent there are at least four aspects of consistency you need to consider:

Consistency from Situation to Situation

Results are predictable. Your predictable and consistent behavior gives children a sense of security. They need not spend all their energy figuring out what parents are going to do next. If rules are consistent results of disobeying them will be predictable.

Enforces Importance. The importance of a rule is learned by consistently having it enforced. John was punished for throwing the ball in the living room on Monday, but was not punished for the same action on Tuesday. The child was confused, not knowing why he was punished one day and not the next. Johnny isn't really learning what rules or principles are all about. Consistent enforcement of rules tells the child that rules are important.

Consistency Between Demands of Parents

Set Common Rules. Parents should be in agreement on how to discipline their children. To become reliable in the child's eyes,they must be consistent in dealing with similar situations. Disagreeing with each other over the child's upbringing can create a confusing situation for the child. As one complained,"Mom tells me I can stay up and watch television and then Dad says she shouldn't allow it."

To avoid this situation, disagreements are best resolved when the children are absent. Inconsistency between parents causes children to play one parent against the other. When parents disagree, children will quite naturally go by the easiest set of regulations. It is easier for all when parents decide on a common set of rules.

Consistency Between Command and Example

In teaching good behavior it's very important for parents to "practice what they preach." Children's values and beliefs are learned more by examples set by adults than verbal instructions.

Screaming at a child to be more quiet or paddling a child for hitting someone smaller than himself is not doing an effective job. Decide what is important and what parental response reinforces what you are attempting to teach.

Consistency Between Verbal and Nonverbal Messages

Frequently there is a conflict of message between parent and child. As the little boy said to his mother "Your mouth says you love me, but your eyes say you don't."

The child is receiving mixed messages - words that tell one thing and nonverbal cues that suggest the opposite. This leaves the child confused as to which message should be acted upon. Parents need to be sure they aren't sending double in-

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consistent messages.

Children Change

Parents can't always be perfectly consistent from day to day or situation to situation. Parents' feelings, children's feelings and specific details are constantly changing. Sometimes your common sense will help you decide when bedtime rules should be modified or table manners relaxed. As children grow, rules and how we deal with them will change. The rules for a four year old will be different for the same child at age six. Some rules will be the same, others will be abolished and new ones will be introduced.

Children Need Consistency

Consistency in dealing with children's behavior is necessary for you to be an effective parent. While no parent can or should expect to be perfectly consistent, some level of consistency is necessary for a child to learn the lessons of social life and feel secure while doing so.

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FAMILY LIVING

FL-12

LISTENING TO CHILDREN

"No one really listens to me." Children in particular sometimes have this feeling.

Listening is an active process of hearing and trying to understand the message underlying anothers' words. Taking time to listen and encourage self expression are important in building and maintaining positive communication between parents and children. Listening gives you an opportunity to better understand how your children's thinking abilities and ideas are changing and progressing as they grow from pre-school to adolescence, and adulthood.

Guides on Listenting to Children

Be interested and attentive. Children can tell whether they have a parent's interest and attention by the way the parent replys or doesn't reply. Forget about the telephone and other distractions. Maintain eye contact to show that you are really with the child. Showing interest in children and their activities will encourage them to express their feelings and make them feel important. Children tend to feel very close to an adult, who, by expressing concern and caring, gets them talking about themselves.

Encourage talking. Some children need an invitation to start talking. You might begin with "Tell me about your day at school." Children are more likely to share their ideas and feelings when others think them important.

Listen patiently. People think faster than they speak. With limited vocabulary and experience in talking, children often take longer than adults to find the right word. Listen as though you have plenty of time. Hurrying children or calling attention to their use of the wrong word while they are talking is upsetting and confusing.

Hear children out. Avoid cutting children off before they have finished speaking. It is easy to form an opinion or reject children's views before they finish what they have to say. It may be hard not to stop them straight, but respect their right to have and to express their opinions. Parents set an example of consideration by waiting their turn to speak. By letting children fully develop their ideas, parents also gain valuable insight into children's understanding and abilities to reason.

Reflect feelings. Perhaps the most important skill of a good listener is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and to imagine what they are experiencing apart from your own thoughts and feelings. Try to mirror your children's feelings by verbally reflecting them back to them. Children feel like you understand when you accept and recognize their feelings as young children. They are not always aware of their feelings, nor can they express them as well as adults. You might reflect a child's feelings by commenting, "It sounds like you're angry at your math teacher."

Restating or rephrasing what children have said is useful when they are experiencing powerful emotions which they may not be fully aware of: Child: "School is dumb! I hate it!"

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Parent: "Sounds like you're pretty angry at something that happened at school today." Young children need to learn that it is okay to have angry feelings but it is not okay always to act on them. You might say, "I know you are mad at her for breaking your toy and you feel like hitting her, but say it with words, don't hit."

Help clarify and relate experiences. As you listen try to clarify your child's feelings by stating them in your own words. Your wider vocabulary can help children express themselves as accurately and clearly as possible and give them a deeper understanding of inner thoughts and words. Child: I got so upset I didn't know what I was doing. Parent: You mean you panicked.

Parents can help children be aware of the relationship between their experiences, feelings and behavior by attempting to draw conclusions and generalizations; summarizing what has been said; making comparisons; and continually checking with the child to verify the accuracy of all understandings.

Listen to non-verbal messages. Many messages children send are communicated nonverbally by their tone of voice, the look on their faces, their energy level, body posture, or change in behavior patterns. You can often learn more from the way a child says something than from what is said. When a child comes in obviously upset, be sure to find a quiet time later in the day when he has his emotions under greater control to help explore his feelings.

Parents Set Examples

Communication skills are influenced by the examples children see and hear. Parents who listen to their children with interest, attention, and patience set a valuable example. The greatest audience children can have is an adult who is important to them and interested in them.

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*These documents and others are available through the ERIC System. For more information contact ERIC/EECE.

Prepared by Lynda Harriman, Extension Child and Family Development Specialist and Nancy Weller, Extension Assistant-Communications.

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FAMILY LIVING

CHILDREN AND TELEVISION

Many parents worry about what heavy television watching may do to their young children. Researchers have been studying the effects of television viewing on young children for more than 20 years. So far, the study results have been complex and controversial.

TV Good or Bad

Findings to date strongly suggest that the effects of heavy television watching are neither straight forward nor simple. Apparently, some children are affected more than others by the content of television shows, or by some aspects of programming, such as the pacing, music, the intensity and level of actions or special visual effects.

The evidence also indicates that children do learn behavior from watching television. However, it's not always clear how much of what they learn this way was new to them and how much was already available to them before hand and simply reinforced by watching someone engage in the same behavior on the screen.

Meanwhile, while the experts argue, parents continue to worry about how to handle this important aspect of their children's lives.

TV's Here to Stay

Since the chances of going backwards in time to living without the magic box are certainly small, the best approach for parents seems to be to make the best possible use of TV and to work toward improving it.

Parents and TV

Monitor Programs. Children learn "good" or desirable behavior as well as aggressive behavior from watching television. In order to increase the learning of desirable behavior, the programs being watched have to be monitored by an adult.

Check Child's Understandings. Take opportunities occasionally to probe your child's understanding of what he or she has been watching. In this way you can help to clarify mistaken ideas and interpretations of what has been seen.

Watch Television with Your Child. This will give you a good chance to observe how he or she reacts to the pace, the speed and intensity of the action and other elements in the program she watched regularly.

Turn the set off. If your child seems to be anxious or uneasy but remains glued to the set don't hesitate to turn it off. You won't harm a child by turning the program off!

You might be wrong in your analysis of what is upsetting the child. But make the mistake of being too careful.

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There are distressing situations children have to confront which cannot simply be "turned-off" as easily.

Talk With Other Parents. If a program is being aired regularly in your community which you find objectionable in terms of your own values and preferences, try to locate other parents among those of your children's friends and agree to ban the program among the children who are friends. This may be hard to do, but is an important part of valuing your own values.

Voice Your Opinion. Don't hesitate to let your child know that you consider a given feature of a program to be in doubtful or bad taste, to be too gross, too noisy, fake or artificial. Your child does not have to agree with you, of course. But he needs to see you as a thinking and discriminating person.

Share Your Values. Let your child know what kinds of portrayals, music, visual images and so on you find satisfying, pleasurable, inspiring, enlightening. This kind of sharing lays the foundation for the development of discriminating aesthetic behavior. Parents often overlook the fact that the acquisition of "taste" is also part of learning and development.

Create Interest. Find out how well your child understands how a program is produced and how sound effects are created. Encourage them to guess or predict how the plot will unfold and develop.

Practicing these kinds of responses to what is being watched on television prepares the child for critical viewing habits that can be used throughout a long life of viewing.

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*These documents and others are available through the ERIC System. For more information contact ERIC/EECE.

Prepared by Lilian G. Katz, Director ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, with Mary Glockner, ERIC/EECE, editor.

FAMILY LIVING

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WHAT'S THE RIGHT AMOUNT?

Just because something is good for children doesn't mean that more of it is better! Even such essentials as affection, attention, and praise are good for children only in the right intensitites and amounts.

Avoiding Extremes

For instance, everyone seems to agree that young children need love and affection. Children who receive too little may feel rejected. But those who get too much can suffer from what is called "smother love." Too little attention can result in feelings of rejection, while too much can cause demanding and whining behavior.

Children need recognition and assurance that they are important to the people around them. Too little recognition may lead to feelings of inadequacy, but too much may cause self-centeredness. Insufficient praise and appreciation can lead to discouragement and feelings of futility. But, in excess, praise loses its meanings.

Finding A Good Balance

As you think about what might be the optimum amount of affection or praise for your child, it is useful to remember that what is optimum for one child may be too much for another or insufficient for a third.

Actually, it's impossible to predict just what will be the right amount of something for all children, or all 3-year-olds or all girls, and so on.

One of the ideas which may help is the concept of threshold. The threshold refers to that point at which a child responds to a particular event such as praise or attention or affection when they get a hug and a smile once a day. Others seem to need lots of attention or praise before they respond to it. These differences can be thought of as differences in thresholds. By observing and listening to your child's reactions to events and experiences, you can get clues about how his or her threshold for praise, affection, etc., might be.

Thresholds Are Learned

While there are apparently inborn differences in such things as temperament or energy level, it seems likely that thresholds for many needs are learned from experience. In other words, some children learn to need a lot of attention (high threshold) while others learn to get along quite well with very little (low threshold). If the threshold is learned, it may be possible to modify it in several ways.

For instance, if you feel that your child expects too much attention from you, you can gradually reduce the

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amount of attention or praise the child is given so that he or she can adapt to lower rates without distress. It also helps sometimes to explain to a child that even though you can't give him or her your attention at a given moment or "on demand," you are thinking of him or her and will get back after a specified period of time (after lunch, for instance.) It is important to follow through on such promises so that the child develops trust and confidence in you.

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*These documents and others are available through the ERIC System. For more information contact ERIC/EECE.

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FAMILY LIVING

HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP INTERESTS

"As long as the children are happy and having fun...!

This phrase, often used by parents of preschoolers to reassure themselves that they're doing the right things for their children, can sometimes be misleading.

Of course, we all want children to be able to enjoy a variety of activities and experiences. But the capacity to do this could be distinguished from another capacity of far-reaching significance in children's development--the capacity to find activities and experiences interesting and absorbing.

What Are Interests?

Interests are those activities in which we become deeply involved and stay with over time - those which we feel compelled to attend to in spite of the routine elements they frequently include.

A child growing up in an environment which fails to support and strengthen this capacity to find some things interesting and absorbing will surely be handicapped.

After all, almost every human endeavor that is worthwhile-including raising a family--requires of us the ability to become interested and absorbed in tasks over periods of time--and to sustain this involvement throughout inevitable periods of routine, and frustration the activity includes.

Guides Toward Helping Children

Be careful in the use of rewards and praise. Recent research suggests that excessive use of either praise or rewards undermines children's interests and their capabilities to find activities intrinsically satisfying. Apparently, when we promise children rewards ahead of time for doing something, we suggest to them that the activity couldn't possibly be rewarding in itself.

Praise can also shift the emphasis so that the spontaneous satisfaction the child originally derived from an activity becomes less important than the accumulation of praise.

Provide opportunities. Make sure your child has opportunities to participate in activities which require his involvement, attention and effort over increasingly longer periods of time. This would include activities that the child can return to after interruptions. Providing opportunities for the child to resume an activity after a break and continuing to elaborate, and develop the activity helps support and strengthen the capacity for interest.

Let your child see your involvement and absorption in your own interests. For instance, gardening, sports,

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music, cooking or photography, can be fairly easily understood by a young child. What's important is that you provide a model of someone who is interested in something in which knowledge, skill and satisfaction develop and grow over a longer period of time.

Happiness is a short and brief burst of good feeling--easy come, easy go. Interest involves energy and effort that can provide the satisfaction which comes from deep involvement, knowledge and renewed challenge over time.

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PARENTS ARE THE EXPERTS

The amount of information on child rearing available in magazines, pamphlets and books seems to be in creasing week by week. Some of this information is useful, some confusing, some contradictory.

As parents, you may be able to benefit from such advice if you examine the recommendations from the experts in terms of your own goals for yourself, your whole family and each family member. (After all, your children have to learn to live comfortably with you -- not with the distant "experts"!

Deciding What Matters

What may be more useful than reading what the "experts" say is to take a quiet moment or two occasionally, to think through what really matters to you--what values, behaviors, habits, ideas, character traits you believe are worth fussing about. Different families have different values, priorities and preferences about many aspects of family life and life in general -- and it's up to the members of each family to decide what is important to them.

For example, table manners are more important in some households than in others; practicing the piano or attending Sunday School more serious commitments in some families than in others. How important is it to you, for instance, that your child remembers to say please and thank you, to put away toys or learn to play an instrument?

Ideas That May Be Helpful

Pick your issues carefully. Be sure you feel strongly and deeply enough about them to withstand fairly persistent challenges.

Limit the issues. Keep the number of issues down to a half-dozen or so. If you have too many issues, you will spend too much time and energy in contention. (Remember, you can always revise your decisions. And as children grow and develop, new issues emerge to replace old ones.)

Take your stand with calm courage and conviction. Once you have settled on what really matters to you. This approach is recommended not only for the sake of your own well-being but for your child's welfare, too. Your child's psychosocial development is greatly facilitated when you give him or her clear signals about what you think is appropriate, worthwhile and desirable. If you are fairly sure about the kinds of behaviors and habits you really feel comfortable with, and want to live with, then you are more likely to communicate your expectations effectively to your child.

Accentuate the Positive

Sometimes parents become too pre-

occupied with children's behaviors they don't like and things about their children that make them feel uncomfortable. They overlook their children's need to perceive clearly what their parents do want, do admire, and do consider worthwhile. Preschool children seem to gain a certain sense of safety when the important adults in their lives not only have values but take stands on them.

Children do not have to like the demands and restrictions we place on them. And they have a right to have their feelings about those demands and restrictions expected even while they yield to us. There may be some days when the comfort of the children is at the expense of the adults, and vice versa. But an optimum environment for young children is one in which both the adults and the children are comfortable most of the time.

What is useful to remember is that growth and development occur over the long run and are affected by the day-to-day quality of the experience of all the people who live together in a family.

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FAMILY LIVING

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CHILDREN'S FEELINGS

Emotions are an important part of being human. Part of our parenting role is helping children learn to recognize and cope with these emotions.

Emotions in children are often aroused when their needs are not being met, or when they are being inappropriately met. For instance, a child who wants to run and play but is being held on mother's lap, will probably become angry, and will manifest that anger by fighting, struggling or crying. But when the child is feeling dependent or hurt, he will snuggle up close to mother.

Dealing with Feelings

Parents need to understand the nature of emotions. Often it is difficult to realize that children's interpretations of a situation may differ from ours. Sometimes because we dislike the way children show their feelings, we punish, ignore or deny that their feelings are real and important. Children often get the message that they are bad for having angry or fearful feelings. They may develop feelings of self-rejection or questions or express their views. Messages like "Boys don't cry","Don't be afraid!" tell children that having unhappy and fearful feelings is bad or wrong. Once we accept our children's feelings as real, rather than innately bad, we can concentrate on helping them recognize and handle these feelings in a more acceptable way.

Sharing. Parents can share their own unhappy feelings with their children. This helps children know they aren't bad for having such feelings. It also opens an important avenue of meaningful communications. When parents recognize children's feelings, they can say, "I know this is how you feel." This helps the children feel understood.

Recognizing. Children need to be able to sort out and deal with their own feelings. When children react to situations emotionally, rather than deny their emotions, we can recognize what they are feeling by saying, "I know this is how you are feeling, you might feel better if_."

Young children are very "me" centered. How "I" feel is the most important. Parents can help them see how their words and actions affect other people. Comments like, "When you do that, I feel so proud and good", or "Your behavior hurts me and makes me feel sad" tell children that others have feelings, too.

Coping. Children may have difficulty coping with their inner feelings. Parents can help children find acceptable and comfortable ways to deal with their feelings by showing understanding and suggesting possible ways of coping. You might say, "We don't kick the furniture when we are angry" or "I won't listen to you yell bad names at me." Then give instruction for dealing with the feelings. You might feel better if you go downstairs and bounce the ball, or go out in the garage and yell, or go and hit a punching bag, or run around the block." You can teach acceptable

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responses to anger that you and the rest of society can live with.

Accept Feelings

Strong feelings cannot be denied, reasoned with or talked out of existence. Attempting to ignore them invites disaster. Acknowledging your children's right to have these feelings opens communications and fosters mutual understanding. Respecting children's feelings will help them feel important as people.

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*This document and others are available through the ERIC System. For more information contact ERIC/EECE.

Prepared by Lynda Harriman, Extension Child & Family Development Specialist, and Nancy Weller, Extension Assistant-Communications.

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UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR

Children are not born with a sense of conscience, good manners, or an adult reasoning ability. As they struggle to learn the social ways of their world, they're bound to make mistakes. These mistakes are often labeled misbehavior.

Consider Individuality

Our understanding of behavior is increased when we watch children grow through one stage of development to the next and see some behaviors disappear and new ones take their place. Children's understandings, assumptions about life, self concepts and feelings about others change as they grow. In turn so does behavior. Trying to see the world from your child's point of view is helpful when it is necessary to redirect the child's behavior.

There is Always a Reason

Discover the reason behind children's behavior. Every psychological action has a cause or explanation.

Put yourself in your children's shoes.

Does the behavior work? Children don't like to be held back or stopped from doing what they want to do. Usually they will exhibit the type of behavior that gets them what they want. If whinning is a successful technique, children learn to use it. Parents need to be sure children know what behaviors are acceptable. When children learn that socially acceptable behaviors have positive results, they learn to use them. Remember, children learn by doing and observing behaviors of others.

Is the child bored and/or tired? Children may misbehave if the weather keeps them indoors. If they are tired or hungry their behavior is also likely to reflect discontent. Be patient with your child and try to change the situation when possible. Keep children busy with activities that are interesting and fun.

Is the child seeking attention? Often children misbehave when their parent's attention is taken away from them. Children need positive attention daily. They need to know there is some time reserved just for them. Praise children when they behave in acceptable ways. Saying "I was so pleased and know I could count on you" encourages children to try again.

Is the child frustrated? Waiting too long for things they want or not being able to do something themselves may result in an aggressive outbrust, demanding or selfish behavior. Sometimes children have not learned another way to express their feelings or wants and have found that a negative display of behavior works. Parents need to set an example by showing a more appropriate way to express feelings and identify wants.

Is the child excited or anxious? If children become overexcited they may forget how to behave or simply lose control. You can prepare children for special events by telling them what to expect. Children should be

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taken away from situations they cannot handle, or they should be given help to handle the situation.

Consider More Than One Cause

Sometimes we may suspect there is only one cause for behavior when there may be several. Pause before you act. Consider all the factors which may be contributing to the behavior. Ask yourself, am I part of the problem or part of the solution? How do I react to the child's behavior? When parents give idle threats, preach and nag, children literally tune them out, becoming parent deaf. Changing your reaction or the way you handle the situation may help them to cope and behave appropriately.

Look at Total Behavior

Labeling behavior is helpful in identifying and understanding certain behavior characteristics. But be careful not to over do it. The same behavior may have quite a different cause in different children. One child may be labeled 'lazy' because he is anxious and afraid to try something new, while another child may be viewed 'lazy' because he is overly tired.

Avoid labeling a child on the basis of a single act. Cynthia at 2½ is not necessarily brilliant because she recites nursery rhymes fluently. It's possible that her parents have spent many hours teaching her this skill. A child is neither untrustworthy, destructive nor brilliant on the basis of a single act. Labeling a child as completely mean, aggressive, or shy puts too much emphasis upon the act instead of the cause. The real danger is that the child may learn to accept the label as real.

Stay Calm, Appraise Fairly

Before reacting to a given behavior it is important to first stop and think "Why did the child do this?" Once we've identified some possible reasons we are ready to ask "What shall I do about it?" When we react to children's behavior in ways that give them experiences which help them become more self controlled they learn to be responsible for their own behavior.

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GAINING COOPERATION

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When children's feelings are respected and we take time to show them what to do rather than waiting to reprimand improper behavior, it is easier to gain their cooperation.

Why Cooperation is Important

Gives satisfaction. Cooperation takes place when individuals coordinate their actions to obtain what they want. For example, when a child wants to use scissors, a parent can first show him how to do so safely. If the child follows the parent's suggestions both feel satisfied from experiencing cooperation.

Improves relationships. Parents all expect cooperation from their children and know that the ability to cooperate affects children's relationships with others. Effective group participation demands cooperation. Children are viewed by peers in a more favorable manner after participating cooperatively together in group play. Cooperation increases attraction toward cooperating others.

From childhood games to adulthood ventures cooperation among individuals will be involved. Helping children learn to deal with another's point of view is a step toward helping them become mature, responsible adults.

Builds responsibility. No family, community or nation can run smoothly without cooperation. Learning to cooperate involves living by rules. Abiding by rules teaches children a sense of responsibility. As our children grow we hope they will assume responsibility for their actions and rely less on the authority of others. This is important for your children's growth and security as individuals.

Family Participation

Cooperation does not develop by itself. It is attained slowly over time through daily practice in exercising judgment and making choices. Sympathy, tolerance, give and take, self-control and respect for others are all involved in the ability to cooperate. Parents who demonstrate these behaviors and can talk about them easily help children learn cooperation.

What Can We Do?

Give choices. When children have a choice, they feel they have some say so about their lives. This makes it easier to cooperate. It is important for our children to learn how to make decisions. It builds their feelings of confidence and a sense of "I can do it." These feelings help children try new things and increase their confidence in similar situations. Decision making becomes easier for children when they have learned to make simple decisions between two or three alternatives. When children are given a choice, their decisions should be accepted, even when they seem not to be the wisest choice. Like adults, children also learn from their experiences. When health and safety are not in danger, experience can be a valuable teacher.

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Show love. Show love to your children in ways they can understand. Give them your complete attention by reading a story, listening to them talk, or playing with them. Children who know they are loved want to please their parents. Be there to help and assist when needed. Give the security of limits. Children need to understand what is expected and how far they can go. Praise children for their efforts. It encourages them to keep trying to cooperate.

Be flexible. Change time, places,or procedures to change behavior. Often when we alter the situation, children are more cooperative. For example, telling children ahead of time that they are expected to do something, and giving them time to finish what they presently are doing, make it easier to cooperate.

Set examples. Focus on the "do's" instead of the "don'ts". Show children the way to act. Instead of "don't throw the ball" say "roll the ball on the floor," or say "just look" instead of "don't touch." It is up to parents to set the example and the guidelines. It is true that children "catch" much behavior from their parents.

Parents as the Stimulus

Children attain a sense of cooperation through their own efforts and experiences. As parents, our examples create the favorable conditions for learning to take place. The specific experiences and opportunities we provide are the basis for learning cooperation.

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*This document and others are available through the ERIC System. For more information contact ERIC/EECE.

Prepared by Lynda Harriman,Extension Child and Family Development Specialist,and Nancy Weller, Extension Assistant-Communications.

FAMILY LIVING

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SHARED PARENTING INCLUDES FATHER

"Mommy, if the doctor brings the baby in his bag, and if Santa Claus brings us toys; if God will punish me when I am bad; and if money grows on trees, why do we need Daddy?" (Segal and Yahraes, 1978).

This child's question seems to reflect a commonly accepted social view of father's importance. The importance of mothers to the development of children has traditionally been emphasized. Research indicates that how fathers interact with their children makes significant impact upon children's lives.

Traditional Roles

Looking at traditional expectations of fathers, we are likely to see rigid customs and taboos. The traditional viewpoint suggests that fathers are unable or reluctant to play the caring role for their children. They are viewed outside of the realm of child-care activities. Mothers perform specific tasks which aid in the health and safety of their children and teach attitudes and values. Fathers are expected to be providers and disciplinarians. They are often viewed as unessential in many areas of their children's lives. The attachment between mother and infant is considered so important and so strong, fathers, too, may view themselves as unnecessary.

Fathers Become Involved

Today the role of fathering is beginning to change. Many of today's fathers are becoming involved right from the beginning with the care and supervision of their children. Attending pre-natal classes with their wives is becoming quite common. They are present at birth and develop an attachment with the baby early in life. Fathers' early involvement with children from infancy on has potential value for children and mother, as well as the marriage relationship. When fathers feel left out, they may become resentful, perhaps even jealous. When fathers are able to share in the joys and responsibilities of parenting, they feel a part of the expanded family unit from the moment of birth on.

Benefits of Shared Parenting

Gives Help and Support. One of the comforting aspects of shared parenting is the mutual help and support possible to each partner. Parents can often work out child learning difficulties by talking over the children's needs and abilities and sharing the responsibility of guiding and teaching children. Parents who support one another can provide more consistent and effective child guidance.

Partner Acts as Sounding Board. Often mothers are expected to be experts in dealing with all kinds of child behavior. Emotional involvement with one's own children coupled with high expectations for them makes it difficult to maintain an objective viewpoint. When parents are able to talk over childrearing difficulties with one another problems are more likely to slip into proper perspective. Both parents bring a different point of view to the discussion helping insure some objectivity. Solo parents who

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have no partner need to find a friend or another parent who is willing to serve as a sounding board from time to time.

Understanding. By sharing some of the childrearing responsibilities fathers become better acquainted with their children. In turn fathers become more knowledgeable about the development of their children.

Provides a Breather. Shared parenting should provide each parent a chance to relax alone away from children. Most parents can do a better job of supervising and caring for their children if they have some time free of the responsibility. Some families have discovered how valuable it can be to plan a regular time each week when one parent takes charge of the children and the other can do whatever he or she likes.

Provide Positive Examples

Children learn the meaning of marriage and family life chiefly through observing their own parents. Parents who enjoy one another and have a happy and effective partnership provide a very positive example. Children also develop their ideas about the roles of men and women in our society from seeing how their own parents behave. In some families as the children get older, father takes responsibility for the boys and mother for the girls. Boys need companionship with both parents, and girls can profit from contact with father as well as with mother.

Father is Too, Important

Fathers have an important place in the family. Those who view their parenting role as one which includes active participation with their children have the potential to develop strong satisfying parent-child relationships.

Children too, have much to gain from fathers who make time to be actively involved with them during their growing years.

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FAMILY LIVING

VITAL SIGNS OF PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

Most parents have days when they wonder whether they are doing an adequate job with their children, whether their children will grow up to be competent and confident. What are the vital signs of development during the preschool years?

ASSESSING DEVELOPMENT

To assess the development of a preschool child, it is helpful to look at the child's functioning over a period of about a month. Children's feelings and behavior fluctuate; there are better and worse days. Over three or four weeks, parents might consider the following aspects of a child's behavior:

Sleep. On the average, over a period of about a month, the child should fall asleep easily and wake rested and ready to go. This does not mean that there may not be some nights when the child lingers, frets, and fusses before going to sleep, and some mornings when he wakes up cranky. Only if these behaviors and feelings are typical is it necessary to take a closer look at the child's situation.

Appetite. On the average, over a period of about two weeks, the child should eat with appetite. That doesn't mean that he won't skip an occasional meal, or even several meals in a row. If, however, you see few signs of real appetite over a period of a week or two, then take a closer look at the child's life.

Bowel and bladder control. Overall, the child should have or be progressing toward bowel and bladder control, especially during the day. That does not mean that there may not be occasional mishaps and accidents, especially at night and especially for the good, deep sleeper.

Spontaneous signs of affection. Over a period of a month or so, the child should spontaneously express affection for one or more of the people he is living with. It is fairly easy to get a child to give good-night kisses, and in some families such embraces are standard practice. But the kind of hugging or cuddling in which the child spontaneously lets you know that he loves you is a pretty reliable sign that he feels included and cared for and feels his life is worthwhile.

Confidence. Generally, the child should be able to sample the "good things of life" appropriate for his age. If a child is so shy or so fearful that he will not go to a neighbor child's birthday party, or visit the zoo, or play outdoors at the nursery school, then his "problems" may be getting in the way of his development.

Expressions of emotion. Over a period of a month, the child should express a range of emotions. Healthy development is indicated by the capacity to feel such emotions as delight, anger, or fear. If a child is able to express these emotions from time to time, parents can feel assured that his development is going well. If over a period of weeks the child expresses only a limited range of emotions, then parents may want to take a look at the child's situation.

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DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

A problem in one of these six areas of a young child's life does not provide conclusive evidence of a disturbance in development. Rather, the overall pattern of functioning in all areas helps put the child's growth into proper perspective.

If the pattern suggests the need for a closer look, then what should be done? First, it is important for parents to remember that whatever may be disturbing the child is probably only temporary; his fate is not sealed by a poor turn of events in the third or fourth year of life. Keep in mind that children are very resilient.

Little disturbances in these areas of development often are simply a hint to parents that a child needs a little more of their attention, to reassure him that he is cared for and valued. If a parent spends some time alone with the child, doing something together that they both enjoy (taking a walk around the block, reading a story, etc.), it usually is easy to restore the feelings of security and self worth that every child needs in order to thrive.

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FAMILY LIVING

CHILDREN'S FEARS

Most of us can recall some fears we had as young children: fears of monsters, of spiders, of dark corners. Such fears are very common among preschoolers, and it takes time for children to learn how to cope with them successfully.

Often parents can help a child along by accepting the child's fearful feelings and reassuring the child that he or she is safe. In other cases, however, the child is not completely safe from the feared danger, and a slightly different approach is called for.

In deciding how to deal with a particular fear, it may be helpful to think of childhood fears as falling into three groups: rational fears, irrational fears, and "borderline" fears that fall somewhere between the first two. Each group of fears may be dealt with in a different way.

RATIONAL FEARS

The world is full of things that any sensible youngster would be afraid of: vicious or loud dogs, hypodermic needles and their pediatric pokers, sly-looking strangers, and so forth. These fears are rational in the sense that their objects can indeed be dangerous. The parent's role is to protect the child from these dangers and, whenever possible, to teach the child some rules and strategies for dealing with them.

IRRATIONAL FEARS

The list of potential fears without realistic foundation is virtually endless. Children may be afraid of monsters, ghosts, witches, or other imaginary creatures.

One mother of a 4-year-old reported that her son called out during the night in great fear that there were snakes in the corner of his bedroom. She responded by fetching the broom and pretending to sweep them out of the room. This response is not recommended because the adult put herself in the ridiculous position of agreement with the child that the feared creatures were indeed there.

It is wise to acknowledge and accept the child's fearful feelings. Never make fun of them. But you should also assure the child that even if dangerous objects were there, you would be able to provide protection. Often the underlying motive of fantastical fears is the child's wish to be reassured that the adult is not fearful and is strong and brave enough to protect him, no matter what dangers might come along.

BORDERLINE FEARS

Some of the most difficult fears to deal with are those in this group. The causes as well as treatments of such fears vary.

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Fear of the dark may be picked up from stories and fables as well as horror movies. The loss of light at night results in the loss of familiar points of reference that give stability and order to our surroundings. Familiar features get lost, distorted or exaggerated by shadows; noises unnoticed during the day seem louder and perhaps stranger in the dark.

A small night light, low-key, simple and consistent reassurance that an adult is in charge and can protect the child from harm are the best responses.

Fear of thunderstorms. Many adults are as afraid of thunderstorms as their children. It would be difficult and probably ineffective to try to pretend that you are not afraid of such things. If you are really fearful in storms, be sure to point out to your child the many adults she knows who are not so afraid, so that she does not think this fear is inevitable. It could also be helpful to remind the child of someone who used to be afraid but overcame the fear, thus providing a good model for the child.

Fears of injury, illness or handicaps. These fears are a bit more difficult to respond to because we cannot guarantee our children that they will never be seriously hurt or ill. Sometimes the fear stems from the child's belief that his own bad or "evil" behavior will be punished by injury. If you think this is the case, reassure the child that illnesses and accidents are not caused by misbehavior, and explain what some of the true causes are.

Fear of being afraid. Sometimes children fear their own fear. They become anxious in anticipation of being overcome by fear (e.g. of Uncle Jim's dog, or of visiting an old great-grandfather who is crippled or blind.) The child in this case can be reassured that the fear is "normal," that it happens to lots of us when we're little, and that we do get over it.

Also, you may help the child feel more confident by suggesting something like this: "if you feel yourself getting nervous or afraid, just think of me (or Dad or Grandma, etc.) and remember how I love you, and that will make you feel better."

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FAMILY LIVING

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

"Honesty is the best policy" is a value most of us strive to impress upon our children. Yet it is amazing how often we lie to them ourselves, probably without realizing that we do so.

Perhaps the word lie seems a bit strong for the statements we make to young children, but any assertion made as though it were true, even though it is known to be false, is a lie. Often, parents are not aware that the casual, "little" lies that seem harmless to them can create serious problems for children. Some of the most common casual lies and their potential hazards are discussed below.

The Teasing Lie. Generations of children have been told that swallowed mellon seeds would soon sprout in the stomach. We may find such tales amusing, but for some children they are a source of intense anxiety. These children may be afraid to ask for reassurance, partly because they fear their worst suspicions will be confirmed, and partly because they fear being ridiculed. Adults often forget the solitary anguish that can be caused by what they think of as casual teasing.

The Ultimatum. Then there's the "ultimatum" or threatening lie, as in, "If you don't come now I'll leave without you." This kind of lie has undesirable effects whether children believe it or not.

Many children, even by four years of age, know that the parent does not mean the threat and will not act upon it. Needless to say, for these children the threat will be ineffective. For a few children, however, there is always some doubt, an underlying insecurity or fear of being abandoned. For these children the threat may be effective, but at great psychological cost.

Because the potential risks are considerable, the best policy seems to be to avoid this practice.

The Bribing Lie. Statements like "If you sit still in church I'll buy you an ice cream sundae" often turn out to be lies, falling into the category of bribery or manipulation. This particular ploy is a tricky one, partly because the actual standard of behavior that the child must meet to get the reward is not clear to all parties involved. For example, how "still" is still enough to get the sundae"? Unless parents are careful to make the standard unmistakable and to provide the promised reward when (and only when) it is earned, they will lose credibility.

It seems to be a better idea to make demands on children's behavior simply in terms of the behavior expected and valued. Firm, clear and serious statements usually have the power to obtain desired behavior in preschoolers, as long as they are used judiciously and implemented consistently. To say, "I expect you to sit still in church, even though I know it is very hard to do that," can bring about the

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desired effect in most children.

The White Lie. White lies may have at least two possible functions: first, to protect the feelings, self-esteem or self-respect of the child, and second, to minimize the likelihood of debilitating anxiety or panic.

The white lie told to protect a child's self-esteem may at times be necessary or desirable. But adults often underestimate children's capacity for realistic evaluation of their own behavior and their own efforts. Often adults lose their credibility when they flatter young children with these lies, even though they have the best of intentions when doing so. Furthermore, if adults behave as though children should always get praise, then children will eventually acquire a powerful "need" for praise and flattery. Neither individual development nor society as a whole is well served by such exaggerated praise seeking and the white lies involved.

The second type of white lie, intended to reduce anxiety, is probably the only type which should be told to children (and even then, only under special circumstances). If a parent has even a slight reason to believe that a child's life may be in danger (e.g., from an accident), and that the child's knowledge of that fact might intensify the danger because of the dynamic effects of panic, then a lie which convincingly reassure the child that he or she is safe seems both humane and strategically justified.

In all other respects, honesty really is the best policy. By being honest with children, parents not only avoid the possible harm lies can do; they also, by example, teach children the value of honesty.

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SPANKING AND DISCIPLINE

Most parents are concerned about how to discipline their children--how to help them develop self-control and a healthy respect for other people. When children misbehave badly, when tempers flare, another concern enters the picture: how to stop a certain unacceptable behavior for the moment. At times like these, many parents of young children are tempted to use a common but controversial method of discipline: spanking.

Is spanking harmful to young children? Is it effective in promoting discipline, in the short run or the long run? These are considerations that parents must take into account in deciding whether or not to spank.

Harmful Effects of Spanking

Some parents are quick to point out that they were spanked when young and were not damaged in the least. Other adults recall their own childhood spankings as moments not only of pain, but of deep humiliation, resentment, and complete powerlessness. In the latter instances, the punishment clearly had detrimental effects that lingered long after the experience.

Does Spanking Work?

It is hard to find reliable or agreed upon answers to the question of whether spanking actually "works." We cannot subject children -- or people of any age -- to different forms of punishment in order to obtain experimental data for determining what the best methods are. The clinical evidence now available (based largely on childhood memories) suggests that spanking has very limited effectiveness. It seems to be effective primarily as a way to clear the air for the moment.

In this respect, spanking is like other techniques of punishment: it is good only for the punisher -- not for the punished. Clearing the air with a good spank may seem to be effective at ending a distressful situation. However, the short-term utility must be weighed against evidence that corporal punishment does not aid children in developing self-discipline.

Spanking Hot and Cold

Overall, spanking can be viewed as something we do despite our own better judgement. It is usually done in "hot" (as opposed to "cold") blood.

To spank in the heat of the moment is not recommended -- though once in awhile it may be unavoidable, and forgivable. But to spank in cold

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blood, as a matter of deliberate, premeditated policy, can be seen as sadistic, and it presents an undesirable model for the child, an example of an unfeeling attitude toward another's pain.

Discipline Without Spanking

There are many alternatives to spanking. Here are some recommended tactics that can prevent some of the problems spanking is [illegible] and that carry considerably less risk for long-lasting damage than does corporal punishment.

- Establish rules and limits that make sense to you, and make your expectations clear to your child. Do so firmly, warmly, and consistently. If, for example, you don't want your four-year old to play with your stereo, insist that she not touch it and stay with the situation until your daughter learns that you mean what you say.

- Make every effort to minimize the number of different situations that give rise to child-adult conflict. Conflict situations are inevitable, but if you find yourself settling disputes every 20 minutes or so, then the fault may lie in your child's environment. Perhaps the solution is to place that stereo equipment out of her reach.

- Resist the temptation to make empty threats, for they can undermine your credibility with your child. They may even lead to feelings of uneasiness or, for some children, to chronic anxiety about what is expected of them.

Keep in mind that the key to successful discipline is to foster respect and self-discipline in the child. This can best be achieved by exhibiting those virtues yourself, in dealing with your child.

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